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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 13th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. DINU (Romania)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

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The meeting was called to order at 11.20 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 102: FINANCIAL REPORTS AND AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS, AND REPORTS OF THE BOARD OF AUDITORS (continued) (A/47/5 and Corr.1, vol. I, II and III, and Add.1 to 3, Add.4 and Corr.1, Add.5, Add.6, Add.7 and Corr.1 (French only) and Add.8 and Corr.1, A/47/315, A/47/460, A/47/500 and A/47/510)

1. Mrs. SHAM POO (United Nations Children's Fund), replying to questions put by delegations concerning the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), said she agreed that the payment of salary allowances and other cash incentives to government employees involved in the implementation of programmes should be the responsibility of the Government of the country concerned. The total amount expended under that item was not available, but it was minimal and concerned only a very small number of countries among the 128 with which UNICEF was implementing cooperation programmes. In the future, in the exceptional cases in which it was impossible to avoid recourse to the practice, the conditions would be strictly established in a memorandum of agreement according to a common formula which a working group of the Joint Consultative Group on Policy was currently studying. It should, however, be noted that the practice was common among bilateral and multilateral aid agencies, which had recourse to it more frequently and for higher amounts than did United Nations organizations.

2. UNICEF policy with regard to liquidity, which had been established by the Executive Board in 1987, was being reviewed. The question would be raised in the Committee on Administration and Finance, but more experience was required before any change in policy could be proposed in the Executive Board.

3. The decrease in the level of programme implementation noted in 1991 was due to exceptional circumstances. Expenditures on emergency operations had reached a record level of $141 million and that had had an impact on the implementation of cooperation programmes. Moreover, the Executive Board had approved several new large-scale programmes - such as that for India ($450 million over five years) - which would take time to launch.

4. Mr. BAUDOT (Acting Controller), replying to questions put by delegations, referred to the question of budgetary control - which might in some cases appear to be an absence of control. He explained that only a very small proportion of the budgetary appropriations for 1990-1991 had been exceeded and said that the Secretariat had taken steps to ensure compliance with the policy in that area, by making sure that departments were well informed of the status of resources for each item of expenditure. The Secretariat would see to it that there were no more cases of over-expenditure in respect of those elements of the budget over which it had control, as opposed to those which were outside its control (fluctuations in exchange rates and inflation) and which, to reply to another question, were currently the cause of some, but not all, the instances of over-expenditure.

(Mr. Baudot)

5. He acknowledged that consultants or experts had sometimes been paid for work which they had not done. The extent of the problem should not, however, be exaggerated since the item in question represented only a very small part of the budget (approximately $15 million in all for the biennium 1992-1993). The Secretariat would nevertheless take steps to see that such cases did not recur by controlling the quality of services rendered and paying only for those which had indeed been rendered.

6. The existing rule established that the bidding procedure should apply to purchases involving $20,000 or more, rather than $10,000 or more. Of the approximately 1,100 contracts which had met that condition during the biennium 1990-1991, almost half had been exempt and there had been 587 requests for bids.

7. As for the question put by the delegation of Yemen concerning non-expendable and expendable property, he would reply as soon as he had the information requested. The same applied to the many important questions raised by the United States delegation, which also required research.

The meeting was suspended at 11.40 a.m. and resumed at 11.45 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 112: PERSONNEL QUESTIONS (A/47/416, A/47/508; A/C.5/47/5, A/C.5/47/6, A/C.5/47/9 and A/C.5/47/14; A/C.5/46/2, A/C.5/46/7, A/C.5/46/9, A/C.5/46/13 and A/C.5/46/16; A/46/326 and Corr.1 and Add.1, A/47/140 and Add.1 and A/47/168 and Add.1)

8. Mr. CISS (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management), introducing the Secretariat reports on personnel questions, emphasized the exceptionally difficult conditions in which the Secretariat had to carry out increasingly complex tasks: a continuing financial crisis, restructuring, the suspension of recruitment and the granting of career appointments, and the assignment of approximately 1,600 staff members to peace-keeping missions.

9. On the question of the privileges and immunities of officials of the United Nations (A/C.5/47/14), speaking in his capacity as Security Coordinator, he said that over the past nine months several staff members had lost their lives, including, most recently, two UNICEF staff members. As the perception of the United Nations had changed, working for the United Nations was no longer a guarantee of security, but rather the contrary. Paying tribute to the staff members who were working in hostile terrain, many of them to provide humanitarian assistance, he said that the organizations of the United Nations system had a joint responsibility for their safety and security but that they could not ensure their protection without the cooperation of Member States. The Organization must, moreover, with their help, continue its efforts to obtain the release of staff members who had been detained or imprisoned, in violation of the Convention on Privileges and Immunities, and to ensure that their rights were respected.

(Mr. Ciss)

10. The report on the composition of the Secretariat (A/47/416) showed that between June 1991 and June 1992 the number of underrepresented Member States had decreased from 24 to 21. During the same period, the number of unrepresented States had increased from 9 to 29, primarily as a result of the admission of 19 new Member States. The suspension of recruitment, put into effect in February 1992, from which successful candidates from competitive examinations had been exempted, had not facilitated efforts to improve the geographical distribution of posts. Competitive examinations for P-2 posts had been conducted in 11 countries; 36 successful candidates had been recruited during the period covered by the report, while 10 offers of recruitment had been made in the subsequent period.

11. Competitive examinations for P-3 posts in five occupational groups had also been held in 1992 in Finland, Germany, Japan, Russia and the United States. Of the 12 candidates selected for recruitment from the 1991 examination, 6 had been or were being recruited. Other competitive examinations for recruitment to the P-3 level would be held in 1993 for three new occupational groups. Consideration was being given to ways of accelerating the examinations process so that it could be completed within four months of the identification of vacancies. The Office of Human Resources Management was convinced that recruitment on the basis of competitive examinations was the most effective way of securing for the various units of the Secretariat the highly qualified staff members they needed to implement the mandates of the United Nations, while maintaining and improving the geographical distribution of posts.

12. Document A/47/508 provided detailed information on the current situation of women in the Secretariat. As at 30 June, women occupied 30.6 per cent of posts subject to geographical distribution, an increase of 1.4 per cent over the previous year. There was no woman at the Under-Secretary-General level, one at the Assistant Secretary-General level and only 10 at the D-2 level. Outside the Secretariat, however, three women occupied posts at the Under-Secretary-General level (in UNHCR, UNFPA and the World Food Programme). There were now 26 women at the D-1 level, as compared with only 20 the preceding year. At the P-2 through D-1 levels, almost twice as many women had been promoted as had been in the preceding year (87, as against 46 in the previous reporting period), while the number of men promoted had remained roughly the same (98, as against 96). Between July 1991 and June 1992, 50 women had been recruited, as compared with 78 men.

13. In response to the guidelines laid down by the General Assembly in resolution 45/239 C, a consultant provided by the Government of Canada had conducted a study of the obstacles to the advancement of women in the Secretariat. Following meetings with managers, staff members and representatives from 15 Member States, she had proposed an action programme stressing the coordination of recruitment, placement and promotion and the accountability of managers (see document A/C.5/47/6). On the subject of sexual harassment, a Secretary-General's bulletin would be issued shortly,

(Mr. Ciss)

together with an administrative instruction and information circular setting out specific guidelines for handling charges of that nature. The Office of Human Resources Management would see to it that the new procedures were applied in a swift and equitable fashion. The restructuring of the secretarial occupation had been completed and had resulted in the upgrading of 60 General Service posts at the G-5 level and above. He emphasized that the current restructuring and the temporary ban on recruitment made the Secretariat's task all the more difficult and he called upon Member States to support the efforts of the Administration to attain the targets set for the representation of women in the Secretariat.

14. With the assistance of consultants made available by the Governments of Australia and France and in consultation with managers and staff representatives, the Office of Human Resources Management had developed an integrated concept of career development. The project, whose components must be implemented gradually, would eventually cover staff in all categories, but in view of the limited resources currently available, it would be limited in the immediate future to a pilot project involving Professional staff serving in the "Administration" occupational group. He drew the attention of Member States to the fact that the system presupposed that external recruitment to posts at the P-4 to D-2 levels would be kept to a minimum. Most of the recruitment would therefore take place at the P-2 and P-3 levels of the Professional category. Budgeting P-1 to P-4 posts together, as was done for posts at the G-1 to G-6 levels, was another important component, which would introduce greater flexibility in the administration of posts and facilitate mobility.

15. Performance evaluation was another aspect of career development which posed problems not only for the United Nations but for Governments as well. The current procedures were being reviewed with the aim of establishing a system which would enhance staff motivation and provide just career development.

16. In view of the fact that the majority of staff remained with the Organization for nearly a quarter of a century and many were called upon to travel to mission areas at very short notice to perform delicate tasks, the Organization must make a strong commitment to effective staff training. Managerial skills were crucial at the current juncture and a comprehensive management development plan was therefore being developed for managers. In order to develop the necessary skills for field activities (including peace-keeping, peace-building and humanitarian assistance), the Secretariat was taking steps to accumulate training capabilities in that area on a continuing basis. Such training was reinforced by management training and the upgrading of skills. In addition, mission-specific training was needed in such areas as crisis management, security and the electoral process. The Secretariat intended to develop peace-keeping training curricula in cooperation with national training institutions, the departments concerned and UNITAR.

(Mr. Ciss)

17. There was also a need to upgrade substantive skills, particularly in the field of computers; systematic refresher courses were planned in all occupational areas (accounting, economics, political affairs, etc.). Training in drafting, communication and language skills was also vital to the effective functioning of the Organization.

18. The success of the proposed plans depended, to a large extent, on the support of Member States. Emphasizing that the Organization's need for highly skilled and motivated staff was greater than ever before and that ever-increasing demands were being placed on the staff, he said that improving the employment conditions of staff was a strong motivator. That was an issue which the Secretary-General considered very important.

19. The CHAIRMAN said that he had received a communication from the Chairman of the Staff Committee transmitting a request from the designated representative of the staff of the United Nations Secretariat who, in pursuance of paragraph 3 (a) of resolution 35/213, wished to address the Committee in order to introduce the report contained in document A/C.5/47/20. Having regard to the practice followed by the Committee since 1981, he said he would take it that the Committee wished to accede to that request.

20. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.